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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 000779

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [EC](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: FINAL PUSH FOR GOE VOTE ON CUBA

REF: A. QUITO 695

[1](#)B. QUITO 682

[1](#)C. QUITO 625

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reason 1.4 (b)

[1](#)1. (C) With the UN Human Rights Commission scheduled to vote on the Cuba resolution April 14 or 15, our campaign to swing Ecuador to "yes" has reached the home-stretch. In the last 10 days, Embassy efforts have included:

-- Calling on GoE President Lucio Gutierrez (Ref B). Gutierrez promised "no worse" than an abstention, but noted that domestic opposition to a yes vote was so fierce as to box him in;

-- Lobbying Foreign Minister Patricio Zuquilanda on the OAS SYG vote and Cuba resolution. On the latter, Zuquilanda recounted a recent GoC demarche for a no vote and his "you must be kidding" response. He offered no indication Ecuador would shift from its traditional abstention position, however;

-- Pressing MFA Bilateral Affairs and Multilateral Affairs undersecretaries for condemnation of Castro in Geneva;

-- Informing Presidency contacts that the USG views countries' Cuba votes with great interest and concern;

-- Approaching foreign diplomats (Spanish, Vatican, other EU) to seek a coordinated lobbying campaign (Ref A).

[1](#)2. (C) Where have we gotten so far? We believe Ecuador remains a solid abstention, but has not entered the yes camp. Reasons are essentially three: a GoE overriding belief in "non-intervention" in the internal matters of other states; a general affinity for Castro's Cuba amongst MFA diplomats; and an Administration fear that a yes in Geneva would destabilize an already teetering government.

[1](#)3. (C) Countering Reasons 1 and 2 are long-term Embassy goals we unfortunately won't reach by April 15. Regarding Number 3 and Ecuador's current, overheated political environment, Gutierrez is wise to avoid any measure that brings the indigenous, about the only group still outside the fray, into the streets. While we have no proof, we imagine our Cuban Embassy counterparts and a visiting GoC vice-minister (and perhaps the Venezuelans as well) already have lobbied indigenous leaders to emerge en masse should Ecuador back the U.S. resolution.

[1](#)4. (C) Conversely, Gutierrez's domestic predicament might also provide an opening for one last push on Cuba. At the height of violent April 5-6 demonstrations in Quito, a frantic Administration official telephoned us, having heard the Embassy "had withdrawn its backing" for the president (untrue). He worried a U.S. policy switch represented the final Administration coffin nail and urged us to continue supporting his embattled boss. Such fears are not exaggerated; popular opinion holds that it was the admonitions of a former U.S. ambassador that emboldened Ecuadorians to depose former GoE President Abdala Bucaram in [1](#)1997.

[1](#)5. (C) Of course we cannot go tit-for-tat with Gutierrez, promising continued U.S. support in exchange for his Cuba vote. But with careful language, we might imply that, by showing backbone in Geneva, the GoE and its president would earn significant USG gratitude. Washington would view another abstention, however, as rejection of a key U.S. policy initiative in the hemisphere.

[1](#)6. (C) We understand that Political Undersecretary Burns will receive Zuquilanda in Washington April 11, WHA A/S Roger Noriega will pull him aside at the same-day OAS special session, and that a senior State official might call President Gutierrez, all conversations focusing on the Geneva vote. Assuming WHA/CCA and DRL will provide basic points on the resolution and the decaying human rights situation in Cuba, we offer here suggestions to tailor the presentation to Ecuadorian realities:

-- Push "principles over politics" to guilt Gutierrez and Zuquilanda toward yes, perhaps focusing on the plight of dissidents imprisoned for their ideals;

-- Note countries that favor the resolution, with focus on hemispheric and, in particular, South American nations;

-- Spotlight supportive governments that also faced a left-leaning, pro-Castro populace, and explain how they overcame public opposition on the Cuba resolution;  
-- Assert an Ecuadorian "yes" would send a strong signal to U.S. policy makers and appropriators (without getting into specifics).

17. (U) Any call to Gutierrez or meetings with his FM must also tackle the evolving, volatile political situation in Ecuador, lately exacerbated by an unpopular Supreme Court decision to allow the once-exiled Bucaram to return. Suggested talking points include:

-- Democracies require strong institutions -- including independent legislatures and judiciaries -- in order to thrive;

-- Thriving, stable democracies invite investment, spawn economic growth;

-- Democracy by its nature is messy and difficult; dialog between actors is key;

-- In the USG you have an ally that wants to help.

KENNEY